

# Editorial | Mentoring: It Makes Good Sense

By Thomas A. Grogan, Jr., P.E., S.E. and Heather Anesta, P.E., M.S., LEED AP

*As our careers have developed over time, most of us can think back to that special engineer or two that spearheaded our development as structural engineers. That special bond between mentor and mentee began in an informal fashion, and it wasn't until later in our careers that the value of that relationship was recognized. At NCSEA, we believe relationships like these strengthen the careers of those involved and significantly increase the value of participating in our organization.*

## A Senior Engineer's Perspective

When I went to college almost 35 years ago, I was told by my high school guidance counselor that my affinity for math and science made me a perfect candidate for engineering. It wasn't until I took a concrete design class in my junior year of college, however, that I found my true calling.

I have had the opportunity to work for firms with as few as 10 to over 10,000 employees.

Most of the mentoring I received over the years came from my supervisors. I never truly appreciated their efforts, but they helped me develop into a very competent structural engineer.

In my current position, I am regularly involved in ensuring that all of our structural engineers are technically strong. Recently, I added leadership training, including how to hire a good engineer, handle tough employee issues, and perform effective employee evaluations, as well as negotiation skills and effective business writing. We began monthly sessions discussing these skills and, over time, our engineers' exposure to these concepts improved their performance.

In 2004, I became involved with FSEA, and NCSEA by extension. I was impressed by the educational offerings and networking opportunities provided, and I was exposed to many young engineers, ranging from recent grads to those with up to 15 years experience. When they expressed a need to be mentored (especially from 2007 to 2010 when jobs were few and far between), FSEA responded by creating a young members group; and I had the opportunity to work with these young engineers, offering career and technical advice. They were very talented and eager to learn. I wanted to ensure that strong computer and calculation skills were developed in concert with practical rules of thumb, which are the types of skills that we "more seasoned" engineers bring to the table. I believe it is imperative that we make mentoring part of our DNA. Then, as we pass the baton to the future of this great profession, we can rest assured that these young engineers will take structural engineering to places we never thought possible.

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## A Young Engineer's Perspective

I graduated from Florida State University in December 2007, just prior to the beginning of the economic downturn. Though grateful to be employed, I was cut to part time while our office issued mandatory pay cuts as my firm's backlog diminished. My boss was my only structural engineering mentor, and now he had much more critical things to focus on than rearing a young engineer. As grim as this appeared, this is the best thing that's ever happened to me. It put me in touch with both FSEA and NCSEA.

I survived 2008-2013 without leaving the structural engineering discipline. I was able to continue my professional and technical growth. I obtained my master's degree and PE license, and I hope to obtain my SE License in 2014. I could not have done this without my employer and my FSEA and NCSEA mentors.

In 2010, I started a "Young Members Group" (YMG) for FSEA's Palm Beach (PB) Chapter. I did this because there did not seem to be a place for EIs and recent PEs to obtain continuing education. We were not aware of all the valuable FSEA and NCSEA events available to us.

After only 3 months, the 2011 FSEA PB YMG had over 30 members. It was clear that there were many EIs and recent PEs other than myself that wanted to devote themselves to becoming competent structural engineers. We met monthly to discuss codes and design techniques. Local, "more seasoned" PEs presented to us monthly on their specialties, and they became our mentors. They were available to us when we had questions, they checked in with us and forwarded valuable information, and they offered us jobs as the economy improved.

Since then, I have been involved in exposing the rest of the country to the YMG experience through NCSEA, and there are currently more than 38 YMGs as a result. If you are a young engineer or student, find your local NCSEA Member Organization, reach out to its board members, and find your mentor(s)! For those "more seasoned", please become a mentor because your knowledge and experience is incredibly valuable!

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The NCSEA YMG Support Committee is now hosting a Mentor Matching Program. The program links together structural engineers of all experience levels and ages based on similar interests. I encourage all of you to visit [www.ncsea.com/members/younggroups/](http://www.ncsea.com/members/younggroups/) and complete a sign-up form. You can sign up as a Mentor or a Mentee – and there is no age restriction for either option! All we ask is that you "JUST DO IT".

